

COMBAT STRESS

Mark A. D. Long, Ed.D.
Health Promotion
Navy Environmental Health Center



Combat Stress Defined

A normal response to an abnormal situation



History of Combat Stress

- Seen in every conflict/war**
- Called by different names**

“Nostalgia”

Civil War

“Shell Shock”

World War I

“Exhaustion”

World War II

“Combat Exhaustion”

Korean War

“Combat Fatigue”

Vietnam

Epidemiology of Combat Stress

- 1982 - Israeli Army - 1 to 1 ratio of combat stress to wounded in action.**
- WWII- Battle of Okinawa - 1 to 2 ratio of combat stress to wounded.**
- WWII - European Theatre - 1 to 4 ratio of combat stress to wounded.**

Overall average rate is 1 to 3 ratio of combat stress to wounded in action.

Combat Stress Can Occur

- > In war.**
- > In operations other than war.**
- > During peacetime training.**
- > During disasters.**

Common Combat Stress Myths

- > He/She is crazy or mentally ill.**
- > He/She is lazy.**
- > He/She is a coward.**
- > He/She won't be able to function in the unit.**
- > It can't happen to me!**

**Combat Stress is a natural result of
heavy mental and physical work
when facing danger under difficult
conditions***

***1994 Leaders Manual for Combat Stress Control, U. S. Army**

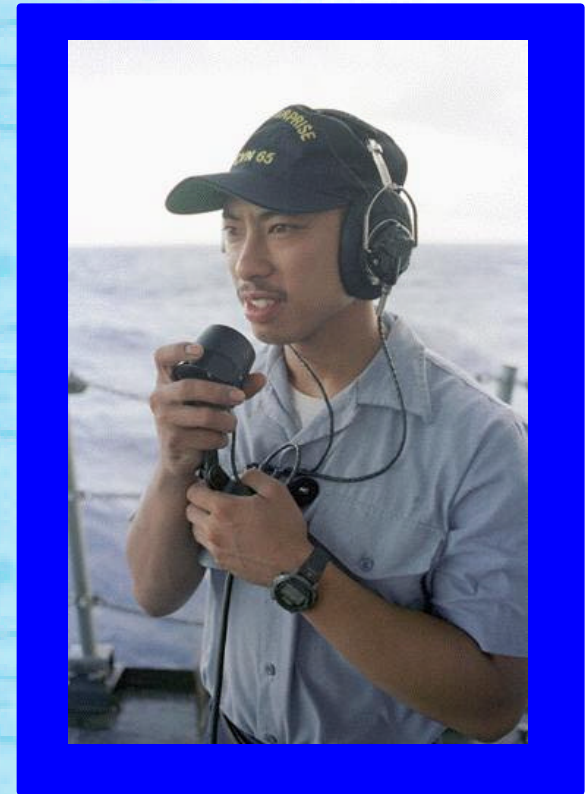
Combat Stress

can happen to anyone!



Common Combat Stress Symptoms*

- > Hyperalertness**
- > Fear, Anxiety**
- > Irritability, Anger**
- > Grief, Self Doubt**



***From Field Manual No 22-51, U.S. Army, 29 Sep 94, Combat Stress Behaviors Leaders Manual for Combat Stress Control**

Combat

Stress

Warning

Signs

- > Physical Stress Complaints
- > Inattention, Carelessness
- > Loss of Confidence
- > Loss of Hope and Faith
- > Depression, Insomnia



Warning Signs

- > Impaired duty performance**
- > Freezing, immobility**
- > Erratic actions**
- > Terror, panic**
- > Total exhaustion, apathy**
- > Loss of skills**

Treatment of Combat Stress

Three Effective Principles

PROXIMITY - Treat in close proximity.

IMMEDIACY - Treat as soon as possible.

EXPECTANCY - Treat with expectation
of normal recovery.

Treat Combat Stress With

- Reassurance**
- Rest**
- Replenishment**
- Restoration**

Treatment of Combat Stress Works!

- > 80% of those treated returned to duty***
- > If untreated, can become large wartime casualty, and may lead to post traumatic stress disorder**

***Kentsmith D.K. (1986)**

Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

- > Sudden Exposure - First experience with battle, and life-death ramifications, and shock and fear.**
- > Cumulative Exposure - Added exposure to the dangers, responsibilities and consequences of battle.**



Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

Physical Stressors and Stress Symptoms -

Factors that reduce the ability to cope especially dehydration and lack of sleep. Also includes - overwork, cold, heat, wetness, noise, poor hygiene, fevers, infections and environmental illnesses.

Contributing Factors to Combat Stress

**Home Front - Recent changes
at home (negative or positive)
may result in worry and
distracted focus.**

Lessons Learned

- > Leadership prevents combat stress.**
- > USN/USMC Can reduce combat stress casualties.**
- > Military can effectively treat combat stress.**

Prevention of Combat Stress

- > **Strong Leadership**
- > **Leaders as positive role models**
- > **Provide realistic and tough training**



Prevention of Combat Stress



- > **Promote Unit Cohesion**
- > **Promote Unit Morale and Espirit de corps**
- > **Educate about Combat Stress**
- > **Physically fit forces**

At the Front - Prevention of Combat Stress

- > Focus on mission and success**
- > Communicate - keep everyone informed about -**
 - expectations**
 - unexpected**
 - situation**
 - delays**
 - rumors**

At the Front - Prevention of Combat Stress

> Care for troops -

- Drink and eat.**
- Sleep, sleep, and more sleep.**
- Clean up - selves, weapons, gear.**
- Provide good shelter and cover.**
- Monitor for problems.**
- Keep busy (maintenance, and recreation if not resting).**

> Debrief after hard actions and trauma.

Combat Stress can be prevented and effectively managed!

